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Students' Perceptions of Campus Sexual Assault Resources: An Appalachian Perspective

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Criminal Justice and Criminology

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by

Rychelle Moses

May 2020

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Dustin Osborne, Ph.D., Chair

Chris Rush, Ph.D.

Nicole Prior, Ph.D.

Keywords: Campus Sexual Assault, Rape Myths, Ecological Development, Appalachia

## ABSTRACT

Students' Perceptions of Campus Sexual Assault Resources: An Appalachian Perspective

by

Rychelle Moses

Research relating to campus sexual assault has traditionally focused on its prevalence and factors that serve to influence risk of victimization. Less attention has been directed toward the presence and effectiveness of campus sexual assault resources. In addition, few studies have explored the role that culture and other geographical factors may play in this process. The current study seeks to address this limitation in two unique ways: (1) determining whether an Appalachian upbringing influences knowledge of and willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources and (2) exploring its impact on adherence to common rape myths. Survey data are gathered from students at a public university located in the heart of the Appalachian Region, with results serving to improve our understanding of how culture affects students' knowledge and perceptions of campus sexual assault resources.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

In 2017, there were approximately 18.4 million individuals enrolled in higher education programs throughout the United States, with the large majority of these students (over 11 million) being 24 years of age or younger (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The combination of stress associated with coursework and new experiences/freedoms that are presented to individuals in this age range may lead to many students being overwhelmed or intimidated. An individual's college years are typically the first time they are away from an established support structure (e.g., their friends and family), leaving them somewhat alone in an unfamiliar environment (Amsel, 2013). This is potentially problematic due to the many challenges that students are faced with during their college careers.

Though these challenges are all worthy of academic consideration, one particular issue that has received attention in recent years is the problem of campus sexual assault. Much has been learned regarding its prevalence and impact as a result (Dick & Ziering, 2016; Fedina, Holmes, & Backes, 2018; Finley & Corty, 1993; Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Wood, Sulley, Kammer-Kerwick, Follingstad, & Busch-Amendariz, 2017). However, it is important to continue this line of inquiry in order to provide information to educational institutions regarding measures that may be taken to address sexual victimization. The current study seeks to do so by assessing students' knowledge of available resources at a regional university in Tennessee and their willingness to use them. Additionally, it attempts to determine whether Appalachian culture may influence these outcomes, in addition to adherence to common rape myths. This chapter serves to provide an introduction to the issue of campus sexual assault and the availability of on-campus

resources for victims. Furthermore, it begins to explain why unique cultures found on college campuses should be examined when conducting research on these topics.

### **Campus Sexual Assault**

There is no universal definition of sexual assault, as laws vary by state. However, the general definition includes the use or threat of force to achieve penetration, as well as a lack of consent from one or more of the parties involved (Finley & Corty, 1993; Koss, Wilgus, & Williamsen, 2014). Despite this variation, numerous federal laws and regulations have been implemented that require higher education institutions to establish policies guiding how they respond to and prevent sexual assaults on their respective campuses. These will be discussed in further detail later on, but include the Education Amendment to Title IX in 1972, the Clery Act, and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act of 2013 (McMahon, Wood, Cusano, & Macri, 2018; Streng & Kamimura, 2015). Each of these policies was established in response to the increasing concern for campus sexual assault and through their various provisions (and corresponding data collection requirements) have allowed for a better understanding of the prevalence of the problem nationwide (Streng & Kamimura, 2015; United States Department of Education, 2011).

**Prevalence.** Previous research has found that more than 20 percent of women and five percent of men pursuing postsecondary education are sexually assaulted during their college career (Dick & Ziering, 2016). Additionally, more than 30 percent of college males have reported engaging in at least one act of aggressive sexual behavior with a non-consenting partner (McMahon et al., 2018). Seeking to further explore the problem, Fedina et al. (2018) found that, among students who had been sexually assaulted, 30 percent of the incidents involved unwanted sexual contact (e.g., kissing or fondling), 25 percent involved attempted rape, and eight percent

involved a completed rape. It is important to note that actual rates of campus assault are likely much higher than those cited in these and other studies, as sexual assault is generally a vastly underreported crime (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Sabina & Ho, 2014; Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006).

For example, it has been estimated that only five percent of individuals that have been sexually assaulted on a college campus file a police report or tell anyone about the incident (Gross et al., 2006; Sable et al., 2006). There are many reasons why victims do not turn to law enforcement or other authority figures within the campus setting, with the most common being fear of retaliation from the perpetrator, concern that their privacy will not be upheld, shame from family and friends, self-blame if drugs or alcohol were involved, fear they will not be believed and distrust in the system (Fisher et al., 2003; Sabina & Ho, 2014; Sable et al., 2006; Walsh, Banyard, Moynihan, Ward, & Cohn, 2010). In addition, relationships with perpetrators may also serve to explain this phenomenon.

Contrary to popular belief, it has been found that many victims of sexual assault knew the perpetrator before they were assaulted (Banyard et al., 2007; Dick & Ziering, 2016; Fisher et al., 2003; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988). More than 50 percent of reported rapes involve non-strangers, whether they be intimate partners or acquaintances (Gross et al., 2006; Koss et al., 1988). In light of this fact, it could be more difficult for an individual to realize when they are in a dangerous situation that may lead to sexual assault. Put differently, an individual may not be as vigilant and aware of potential dangers when they are with someone that they know (Dick & Ziering, 2016; Koss et al., 1988). Additionally, a victim of sexual assault may be more hesitant to disclose the incident if they were assaulted by a non-stranger for fear of no one believing them

or being embarrassed because they knew the perpetrator prior to the assault (Banyard et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2003).

**Risk factors.** Research suggests that several factors may influence risk of sexual victimization in the campus setting (Banyard et al., 2007; Fedina et al., 2018; Wood et al., 2017). For example, differing rates of victimization have been found in relation to race/ethnicity, with Native American college women (40 percent) reporting the highest rates, followed by White college women (16 percent) (Koss et al., 1987; Krebs et al., 2011). Rates are somewhat lower for women attending historically Black colleges and universities (14 percent), though not significantly different than those seen among students at other types of educational institutions (Krebs et al., 2011).

In addition, the number of dating and consensual partners an individual has appears to increase their likelihood of being sexually victimized (Banyard et al., 2007). College-aged individuals tend to have more dating and sexual partners than those in other age groups, as they have not yet reached the point where it is common to enter into long-term monogamous relationships (Banyard et al., 2007; Koss & Dinero, 1989). It has been found that college students perceive traditional, monogamous relationships to restrict their finances and time, pushing them into more casual sexual relationships during this period in their life (Downing-Matibag & Geisinger, 2009).

An additional factor that could increase an individual's likelihood of becoming a victim of sexual assault is the perpetrator mistaking friendliness as sexual intent. Approximately two-thirds of college women report that they have been in a situation where a male they were interacting with misconstrued the level of sexual intimacy they had intended (Abbey, Cozzarelli, McLaughlin, & Harnish, 1987; Sabina & Ho, 2014). There is a higher risk of sexual assault if

both parties involved in the situation do not verbally communicate what is expected, resulting in a misinterpretation of sexual intent (Sabina & Ho, 2014).

The presence of alcohol is a final variable worthy of discussion. Previous research has found that approximately 74 percent of perpetrators (as well as 55 percent of victims) had consumed alcohol prior to the incident (Koss et al., 1988). This is particularly concerning as it relates to college students because this demographic has a higher likelihood of attending parties or other functions where alcohol is present. This is partially due to most students reaching the legal age to purchase alcohol during their college tenure. It is more difficult to establish consent from an individual when alcohol is involved, thus creating an elevated risk for sexual assault among college-aged individuals (Abbey et al., 1987; Sabina & Ho, 2014).

**On-campus resources.** Because of the many risk factors present within the college environment, policies have been implemented over the last decade in order to provide improved on-campus resources to sexual assault victims and establish programs designed to increase awareness of the problem. Title IX is a federal civil rights law that has been amended to include requirements that colleges and universities throughout the United States must follow when responding to and preventing campus sexual assault (United States Department of Education, 2011). Despite this, the availability of resources for campus sexual assault is not consistent across all educational institutions in the United States. Some colleges provide students with more resources and education related to campus sexual assault than others (Koss et al., 2014). Since sexual assault is an underreported crime, especially on college campuses, universities may not recognize the importance of providing resources that would fully serve their diverse student body. By further researching the knowledge and perceptions of on-campus sexual assault

resources (specifically among Appalachian students), educational institutions may be able to implement additional resources and policies that better fit the needs of their students.

### **Current Study**

Though many factors serve to influence underreporting of sexual assault, one may be the lack of the availability or knowledge of sexual assault resources found on college campuses (Wood et al., 2017). The purpose of the current study is to cultivate an understanding of the awareness and willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources among students at a public university located in the Appalachian Region. This is accomplished through the collection of survey data from undergraduate students attending the university during the 2019-2020 academic year. The study utilizes Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory of development to assist in explaining why an individual's knowledge and perception of sexual assault resources may be affected by their cultural upbringing (e.g., Appalachian). Previous research has examined sexual victimization in postsecondary education in relation to student demographics, such as race, gender and class (Banyard et al., 2007; Fedina et al., 2016). Various cultures have been among the populations that have been studied; however, the Appalachian culture is one that has yet to be addressed (Snyder, 2014). The current study fills this gap in the literature by exploring the perceptions of campus sexual assault resources among a sample of Appalachian students.

### **Appalachian Culture**

Appalachia is a geographical region of the United States that encompasses portions of 13 states spanning from New York to Mississippi (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2019b). Data from the 2010 United States Census indicate that approximately 25 million individuals reside within its boundary. The Region has previously been described as "economically, socially, and geographically isolated from the rest of the country" (Snyder, 2014, p. 22). Historically,

residents of Appalachia have been largely dependent on natural resource industries, such as coal and lumber, for employment and survival. Low wages and the decline of several of these industries has meant that some residents of Appalachia earned just enough wages to provide for their family with no financial stability in place to make superfluous purchases, while others were not able to sufficiently provide for their family at all (Snyder, 2014). Due to the specific hardships many of the residents face, some scholars argue there is a distinct culture that can be found within the Region (Snyder, 2014; Coyne, Demian-Popescu, & Friend, 2006).

Much of the Region's culture is centered on family. Because Appalachia primarily consists of rural and mountainous areas, geographical barriers exist that force individuals to rely on family and friends (as opposed to professionals) for healthcare and other resources (Coyne et al., 2006). This has contributed to a general lack of trust in medical professionals and other individuals in positions of authority (Murphy & McConnell, 1982; Coyne et al., 2006). In addition, it is common for families in Appalachia to give power over the family to males of the household. As such, women in Appalachia tend to defer to males and view them as authority figures (Murphy & McConnell, 1982). The value placed on family and friends, as well as this patriarchal mindset, could impact an individual's awareness of being sexually assaulted. For instance, an individual raised in a region where these particular values are prioritized may not perceive an incident as a sexual assault despite the incident conforming to the legal definitions of it. Even after relocating to a new area, as is sometimes done when an individual goes to college, an Appalachian upbringing may affect one's behavior when faced with a challenging situation such as sexual assault.

Attending college is something that many individuals strive to do, regardless of their demographic. Despite this, the rate at which Appalachian high school graduates attend college is



currently between 35 and 55 percent, much lower than the national average (approximately 63 percent) (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2019a). This means that fewer than 20 percent of Appalachian residents over the age of 25 have a college degree (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2019a). As previously mentioned, there is a unique culture found within Appalachia, and this culture combined with low rates of postsecondary education may make some aspects of attending college more difficult for Appalachian students.

Residents of Appalachia who do pursue postsecondary education may find it challenging to utilize student resources, specifically those focused on campus sexual assault. Because college students from the Region have a higher likelihood of being first-generation college students (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2019a), they may not be knowledgeable of the process of reaching out for help via student resources. Additionally, because these students are originating from an area where professionals are not trusted as previously stated (Coyne et al., 2006), these students may possess a similar level of mistrust toward university administrative staff. This mistrust could dissuade Appalachian students that have been sexually assaulted from utilizing on-campus resources.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter served to provide a basic understanding of campus sexual assault and the emergence of on-campus resources available to sexual assault victims. Despite colleges and universities being required to provide these resources, little uniformity exists in terms of how they go about doing so. This fact, along with the idea that certain demographics have differing perceptions of seeking help, could mean that some demographics (such as students from the Appalachian Region) are not aware of, nor comfortable with, utilizing on-campus sexual assault resources.

The following chapter will discuss the available literature on campus sexual assault and resources available to victims. In addition, it will further discuss how Appalachian college students' willingness to utilize on-campus sexual assault resources may be explained by social development theories. Chapter three will detail the specific research questions pertaining to the current study, as well as the methodology utilized to answer them. Chapter four will discuss the results from the analysis and chapter five will further explain the meaning of the results as well as how they can be utilized to improve on-campus sexual assault resources.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

As stated in the previous chapter, the purpose of the current study is to further our understanding of the awareness of on-campus sexual assault resources among Appalachian students, their willingness to utilize them, and the impact of culture on adherence to common rape myths. The current chapter discusses the legal responsibilities of universities in terms of campus sexual assault education and victim resources, in addition to research exploring the accessibility of these resources. The prevalence of sexual assault and adherence to rape myths in Appalachia are also discussed. Finally, it provides an overview of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory, with a specific focus on how this framework can be applied to the topic at hand.

### **On-campus Sexual Assault Resources**

Various organizations—both public and non-profit in orientation—have provided resources to sexual assault victims since the 1970s (National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, 2000). Though these were initially designed to assist individuals from all walks of life, the realization that female college students featured the highest level of victimization prompted universities and policymakers to focus new efforts on this population (Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2005; Streng & Kammimura, 2015). In conjunction with this movement, the United States Department of Education (2011) established additional policies that universities had to adhere to regarding campus sexual assault.

**Title IX requirements.** Recall that Title IX is a federal civil rights law that prohibits any university from discriminating against students on the basis of sex (Streng & Kammimura, 2015). The United States Department of Education drafted a guidance document in 2011, also known as a *Dear Colleague Letter*, to ensure that it was understood that policy requirements

regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault were also included in Title IX. This letter stated that universities are required by law to promptly respond to any act of sexual harassment or sexual assault, work to prevent any recurrence, and respond to any effects that resulted from the incident (Carroll et al., 2013). More specifically, they are required to provide a notice of nondiscrimination, employ a Title IX Coordinator and establish a protocol for students to report victimization to campus authorities (United States Department of Education, 2011). Loss of federal funding is the primary repercussion for failure to comply with these requirements (Streng & Kammimura, 2015).

***Notice of nondiscrimination.*** This requirement declares that a university must publish and distribute a notice to all students and their families, as well as employed faculty/staff, stating that the university does not discriminate on the basis of sex (United States Department of Education, 2011). However, providing a general statement that the university does not tolerate discrimination based on sex may leave students unaware that sexual harassment and sexual assault are considered discriminatory conduct under Title IX (Lund & Thomas, 2015). Thus, it has been recommended that all notices state that discrimination includes actions falling under the umbrellas of sexual harassment and sexual violence (Carroll et al., 2013). It is also required that this notice include the name and contact information for the university's Title IX Coordinator (United States Department of Education, 2011).

***Title IX coordinator.*** The Title IX Coordinator is an individual employed by the university whose primary responsibility is to respond to any complaint made by a student or employee relating to sexual discrimination (including harassment and assault) (Streng & Kammimura, 2015). This individual is barred from having any other responsibilities within the institution that could create a conflict of interest when responding to a Title IX complaint

(United States Department of Education, 2011). In addition, they are tasked with working alongside campus and local law enforcement to ensure that officers are aware of Title IX policies and follow them when investigating potential crimes (United States Department of Education, 2011). By having a designated employee responsible for responding to Title IX complaints, it is conceivably easier for an individual to determine who they need to approach in the event of victimization (McMahon, 2008; Streng & Kamimura, 2015). Reporting a sexual assault can be an intimidating experience for students, and the designation of a Title IX Coordinator should serve to reduce the stress involved (Koss et al., 2014).

***Grievance procedures.*** Grievance procedures outline the process of filing a Title IX complaint with the respective institution's coordinator (Carroll et al., 2013). It is important to note that this is typically an informal procedure in that law enforcement is not required to become involved. If the victim wishes to pursue more formal action, they are referred to the primary investigative agency, be it a campus police department or local law enforcement entity (United States Department of Education, 2011). It then becomes the responsibility of the Title IX Coordinator to ensure these more formal procedures are in compliance with the Title IX requirement of a "prompt and equitable solution" (United States Department of Education, 2011, p. 8).

Title IX requires that students and their families, as well as faculty and staff, are made aware of the process for filing both informal and formal complaints (Lund & Thomas, 2015). Additionally, there must be an "adequate, reliable, and impartial investigation of complaints, including the opportunity for both parties to present witnesses and other evidence" (United States Department of Education, 2011, p. 9). The educational institution must also ensure that each stage of the procedure and investigation adheres to fair and prompt time frames (Carroll et al.,

2013). Finally, a notice of the results of the investigation must be provided to all relevant parties and the university must take steps to prevent any future sexual harassment and sexual assault for both the victim and the greater student population (United States Department of Education, 2011).

In addition to these primary requirements, institutions are obligated to educate the campus community (as a preventive approach) via regular and effective programming (United States Department of Education, 2011). It is important that these programs include the definition of sexual harassment and sexual assault, along with addressing the university's zero-tolerance policy for this type of conduct (Streng & Kammimura, 2015).

As previously stated, any institution that is found not in compliance with these Title IX requirements is at risk of losing federal funding. With that said, there is little uniformity across universities and colleges as it relates to campus sexual assault resources or response procedures. Additionally, some institutions are not compliant with these requirements and have previously been (or are currently) under Title IX investigation for such noncompliance, raising concerns regarding implementation and effectiveness (Sabina & Ho, 2014; Walsh et al., 2010).

**University compliance with Title IX.** As of 2015, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights was actively investigating over 100 colleges and universities for noncompliance with Title IX's sexual assault policy (New, 2015). The most prominent reason relates to the lack of an established Title IX coordinator position at these institutions (New, 2015). Inadequate availability and advertisement of resources is another common problem. For instance, Hayes-Smith and Hayes-Smith (2009) reviewed the websites of 60 universities in the United States, finding that only 33 percent of their sample listed the location of a women's resource center on campus. Further, over 50 percent of included institutions had little to no

literature regarding sexual assault resources available on their website (Hayes-Smith & Hayes-Smith, 2009).

Similar results were obtained by Karjane, Fisher, and Cullen (2002), who reviewed sexual assault materials from 1,015 universities in the United States and found that only 38 percent included sexual assault information in orientation materials, and only 29 percent had on-campus victim services. They did find, however, that over half of the included institutions distributed information regarding sexual assault resources to their students and faculty (Karjane et al., 2002). It is important to note that even if universities are compliant with Title IX, students may still lack the knowledge of these resources and where to turn if they become a victim of campus sexual assault.

**Student knowledge of sexual assault resources.** Research has shown that college students in the United States are not very knowledgeable of on-campus sexual assault resources (Hayes-Smith & Hayes-Smith, 2009; Lund & Thomas, 2015; Nasta et al., 2005; Sabina & Ho, 2014; Streng & Kammimura, 2015). These resources include the Title IX Coordinator, medical treatment, counseling, support groups, and religious services (Sienkiewicz, 2018). For example, Walsh et al. (2009) found that while most students included in their sample (n=1,230) recognized sexual assault as an issue on their respective college campus, few were aware of on-campus services for victims. These results were echoed by Hayes-Smith and Hayes-Smith (2009), who found that while 54 percent of students in their sample (n=244) reported receiving information on sexual assault resources, only 39 percent knew where to locate services on their campus (Hayes-Smith & Hayes-Smith, 2009). As such, the likelihood of using on-campus sexual assault resources is worthy of attention when seeking to understand the effectiveness of university policies regarding sexual assault.

Student's lack of awareness of available on-campus resources could occur for one of two reasons. First, educational institutions may not be distributing literature about the various resources available on their campus in an effective manner (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2016). For example, they may not use all available distribution platforms (e.g., social media, bulletin boards, and institution websites), resulting in students not receiving any information. Another possible explanation is that students simply forget that they received any literature about sexual assault resources, as they are overwhelmed with materials during orientation sessions. Burgess-Proctor et al. (2016) state that many students only receive a flyer or brief lecture following enrollment. It is possible that other stresses involved with integrating into a new environment and routine inhibit students' ability to recall every available resource should it be needed (Lund & Thomas, 2015).

**Student utilization of sexual assault resources.** Numerous researchers have explored the utilization of on-campus sexual assault resources (Fisher et al., 2003; Nasta et al., 2005; Sabina & Ho, 2014; Sable et al., 2006; Walsh et al., 2010). Across these studies it has been found that between 20 and 80 percent of students who are victims of sexual assault do not utilize on-campus resources, only disclosing the incident to close friends (Fisher et al., 2003; Nasta et al., 2005; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher & Martin, 2007; Littleton, 2010). This seems to be especially true for male victims, who report at much lower rates than their female peers (Banyard et al., 2007; Sabina & Ho, 2014). Further, it appears that those who do report their victimization to campus authorities may only do so to prevent the victimization of others, rather than to help themselves recover from the incident (Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti & McCauley, 2007). With that said, some evidence exists suggesting that students may seek the help of off-campus services (e.g., crisis centers) as an alternative (Krebs et al., 2007; Sabina & Ho, 2014).



The rationale for non-utilization of resources has been the focus of some investigation. Taken as a whole, this work reveals that college students fail to report for reasons similar to those witnessed with the general population of assault victims (Nasta et al., 2005). For example, students may fear that their situation will not remain confidential and/or that the perpetrator will retaliate against them. In addition, they may be overcome with embarrassment or guilt (Nasta et al., 2005). Research also shows that victims of campus sexual assault do not file a report because of a lack of resources and/or perceived cultural/language barriers (Sable et al., 2006).

Because students' knowledge of, and willingness to utilize, on-campus victim services is lacking, it is important to continue to explore why this is the case. Though little attention has been directed to the topic, it is possible that perceptions and willingness are affected by a student's culture (e.g., Appalachian). It is well-established that an individual's background and upbringing can determine how they respond to experiences later in life (Rosenfeld, Richman & Lowen, 2000; Rueger, Malecki, Pyun, Aycock & Coyle, 2016; Saxe, 2015). In line with this understanding, the next section will discuss the prevalence of sexual assault in Appalachia, the elevated likelihood that individuals in the Region will conform to common rape myths, and the reasons why they may be less likely to utilize resources provided within the campus setting.

### **Sexual Assault in Appalachia**

While sexual assault is a problem across geographies, rates of sexual assault are higher among the Appalachian population (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). Furthermore, Appalachian residents have been found to believe common rape myths more so than their counterparts residing in more urbanized locales (Swank, Fahs & Haywood, 2011). This makes it important to further explore the available literature on the relationship between Appalachian

culture and sexual assault in order to develop interventions to reduce victimization among residents of the Region.

**Prevalence of sexual assault in Appalachia.** Previous research has found that intimate relationships are significantly more dangerous for women in rural areas than for those in urban and/or suburban areas (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014; Rennison, DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2012). For example, women in rural areas experience sexual assault committed by their intimate partners at more than three times the rate of urban women (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). Though various theories have been put forth to explain this phenomenon, a general consensus has been reached that one of the primary causes is the adherence to a male-dominated culture in rural communities (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014).

As discussed within the initial chapter, families in Appalachia tend to value a patriarchal culture where males are the dominant heads of households (Snyder, 2014). This often leads to patriarchal male peer support, which is more common in rural communities than in urban communities (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009). Put differently, support from male peers in the form of socialization could be a contributing factor to the increased rates of sexual assault in rural Appalachia. Supporting this logic, DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagan, and Hall (2006) found that 67 percent of interviewed women in rural Ohio reported multiple ways in which their ex-partners' male peers rationalized, perpetuated, and even encouraged separation/divorce assault. This type of assault occurs when an individual attempts to leave an abusive relationship, causing the abusive partner to feel as if they are losing control of the other person. The loss of control oftentimes leads the abusive partner to retaliate in a violent manner, which is met with the approval of their friend network, perpetuating the cycle (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009).

Another issue that arises from this tight-knit and male-dominated culture is the lack of reporting sexual assaults to law enforcement due to the acceptance of male-to-female violence in rural communities (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). For example, a woman may not report her husband to law enforcement because he is the head of the household and she may not see the incident as an actual sexual assault. Additionally, the small size of most rural communities may lead to biased policing (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). For instance, a sexual assault victim in a rural community may not report the incident because the perpetrator has friends on the police force or because past experiences teach them that authorities will not take their victimization seriously.

Rural officers self-report responding to calls in a more informal manner than their urban counterparts, with interactions typically casual in nature and oriented toward finding solutions outside of the legal system (Liederbach & Frank, 2003). This becomes problematic when officers in rural communities respond to domestic violence or sexual assault because the lack of formal investigation leaves the victim feeling as though they are not believed or that the system is not concerned with their suffering or needs (Benson, 2009). In turn, it may become more likely that sexual assault is not openly discussed and that individuals within the Region may begin to embrace common myths regarding rape.

**Rape myth adherence and Appalachia.** Rape myths have been defined as the “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) elaborated upon this concept by stating that rape myths are also “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held” (p. 704). It is common for individuals from rural Appalachia to conform to these beliefs—as well as traditional gender roles viewing males as more aggressive and holding authority—leaving some females

feeling more subdued and subservient (King & Roberts, 2011; Snyder, 2014). This mindset has also led to some residents of Appalachia embracing common rape myths.

One of the more common myths is that a person cannot be sexually assaulted by their partner or spouse (Colby College, 2019). Unfortunately, this has been perceived as truth among many Appalachian residents because, and as previously stated, males typically hold a more authoritative role in Appalachian families. As such, incidents of sexual assault may be seen as women fulfilling their wifely duties (Swank et al., 2011). Compounding this problem, rape is a common punishment for Appalachian women that deviate from traditional gender roles that suggest they should be subordinate to their spouses (King & Roberts, 2011). This perpetuates the notion that spousal rape does not fall under the category of sexual assault, but instead is an acceptable tool for men to remain the authoritative partner.

Another commonly accepted myth is that males cannot be sexually assaulted, nor do they need comprehensive services because it is easier for them to recover from victimization (Colby College, 2019). This has been found to be applicable to Appalachian culture, as men in the Region are seen as more aggressive, manly, and not expressive of their emotions (Swank et al., 2011). Moreover, Appalachian males may be more hesitant to report sexual assault or seek services due to isolated communities, the likelihood that law enforcement officers may know them personally, and fear of their male peers learning about their victimization (King & Roberts, 2011; Sable et al., 2006).

A third myth applicable to Appalachian culture is the belief that seeking help in the form of victim services is financially prohibitive (Colby College, 2019). While financial concerns may deter individuals across all cultures and environments from taking advantage of available resources, those in the Appalachian Region tend to suffer from high levels of poverty. Contrary

to common belief, counseling, advocacy, and medical services are provided to sexual assault victims for free or at a low cost by service providers (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, 2019). Despite this, residents in rural Appalachia may not be aware these services are available due to the geographical isolation they often face and the lack of resource promotion.

Although the aforementioned myths can easily be found within the Appalachian culture, there are other myths that exist among the general population that may also apply. For instance, some individuals believe that victims of sexual assault are responsible for their victimization because of their actions (e.g., flirtatious behavior) or what they were wearing (e.g., revealing clothing) (Arizona Coalition to End Sexual & Domestic Violence, 2019). Additionally, it is a common belief that once consent is given, it cannot be revoked (Arizona Coalition to End Sexual & Domestic Violence, 2019; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Other applicable myths include the belief that women falsely report sexual assault or say that they were assaulted after a sexual encounter they regret or find embarrassing (Colby College, 2019).

In summation, sexual assault and adherence to rape myths are both more prevalent in rural Appalachia than in more urbanized areas (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014; King & Roberts, 2011). Because of this, it is important to develop an understanding of why this is the case and how this reality may influence the likelihood that individuals will seek out resources should they be victimized in a campus setting. The following section will further explore the potential impact of Appalachian culture through the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory before turning to an overview of the goals of the current study.

### **Sexual Assault Resources and Social Theory**

Criminological theories do not typically focus on how an individual responds to victimization, nor do they focus on resources available to victims of crime (Fisher, Reynolds &

Sloan, 2016). Rather, they tend to focus more on why crime occurs and how individuals become predisposed to criminality (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2015). Victimization and the availability of victim resources are, however, of interest in other disciplines, such as the fields of sociology and psychology. It is typically professionals in these other disciplines that conduct research on sexual assault and victim resources. For example, Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory, developed outside of the field of criminology, is one theory that may be applicable to better understanding perceptions of sexual assault and utilization of campus sexual assault resources.

**Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.** Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory was considered groundbreaking at the time of its conception because of its merging of disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science). Bronfenbrenner (1979) posited that applying lessons from each was crucial in the explanation of human development because it is a multi-faceted process that is dependent on a series of layers. Each layer acts both independently and in conjunction with other layers to influence how an individual will grow and develop. Five total layers are conceptualized within the theory and include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

**Microsystem.** The first layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory is referred to as the microsystem. This is the most immediate layer to an individual and includes the intimate groups an individual is involved with. Examples of microsystems are an individual's family, school, church, and community. These groups are hypothesized to be a significant influence in the emotional and social development of the person (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1986; 1995).

Interactions between an individual and the different microsystems they are involved with will

play a role in how they foster a social support system and how they will treat other individuals (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1986; 1995)

**Mesosystem.** This layer of development encompasses the various microsystems an individual is part of and their interconnectedness (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1986; 1995). For example, a mesosystem is the relationship a parent has with a child's friends or school. If a parent has a negative reaction to their child's friend, that child could develop an internal struggle of whether they should listen to their parent or ignore their parent's disapproval and choose to place greater value in the friendship. Negative mesosystems are hypothesized to result in problematic behaviors for a child (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1986; 1995).

**Exosystem.** The third layer of development in Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory goes beyond the individual and the different groups with whom they associate. Specifically, it relates to how the microsystem can influence both formal and informal social structures that an individual is not immediately associated with. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986; 1995), these formal and informal social structures can include, but are not limited to, the world of work, media, and law enforcement. This layer is a vital component in shaping how an individual will interact with these different institutions later in life (e.g., reporting an incident to authorities at a university). A negative perception of these organizations could lead to a social isolation that is detrimental to one's success.

**Macrosystem.** A macrosystem is not a physical group in which an individual belongs. Rather, it encompasses the attitudes and ideologies of a particular culture or subculture and includes the motivations, roles, and activities found within that culture. An example that is of particular interest to the current study is the differences found between urban and rural cultures. The ideologies found within a particular culture can affect an individual's ability to integrate into

a new culture that possesses conflicting attitudes and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986; 1995).

***Chronosystem.*** The final layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory differs from the others in that it refers to the influence of time on an individual's development. One example of a chronosystem is how becoming a parent at the age of 16 affects an individual differently than becoming a parent at the age of 30. Divorce, the death of a family member, and moving to a new state are also examples of a chronosystem. The layers in Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) framework may be best conceptualized as beginning with the individual's most immediate surroundings and extending outward to greater influences such as the culture that they are socialized into, with the passage of time serving to condition each.

**Empirical support for the ecological model.** Some support has been found for the theory in the research literature. For example, Anders and Christopher (2011) used the ecological model to explain a female's decision to assist in the prosecution of the perpetrator of their victimization. Their research examined 440 cases of rape and attempted rape in a city in the Southwest Region of the United States over a six-year period (1998-2004). Findings revealed that females with less social support at the microsystem level were less likely to aid the prosecution. They also found that adherence to rape myths (macrosystem) played a role in this decision, with those embracing these myths also less likely to offer aid.

Campbell, Dworkin, and Cabral (2009) examined the impact of sexual assault on mental health using Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) framework through a meta-analysis of previous research. It was found that positive social reactions (microsystems) decreased the likelihood of the victim developing mental health issues after the assault, while secondary victimization from actors in the legal system (meso/exosystems) predicted higher rates of post-



assault mental health issues (Campbell et al., 2009). They also found that the “rape-prone culture” (macrosystem) and cumulative sexual assaults over an individual’s lifetime (chronosystem) increased the likelihood of mental health issues after the assault (Campbell et al., 2009).

Taken together, these works (and other examples in the literature) suggest that Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1986; 1995) theory may be useful in understanding a wide range of phenomena, including responses to sexual assault victimization. The current study seeks to determine whether perceptions of sexual assault and resources for sexual assault victims among Appalachian college students may be better explained through reliance on its core tenets. The following section provides a framework for this potential application.

**Ecological theory and Appalachia.** Each layer of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory can be applied to the specific culture found in rural Appalachia. Family, school, church, and community (microsystems) are groups that are deeply valued among rural Appalachian families (Snyder, 2014). Though similar values may be found in urban areas, the high rates of poverty and geographical isolation found across much of Appalachia provides an additional level of collectivism and camaraderie in these communities (Welch, 2011). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1986; 1995) mesosystem layer, or the interaction between microsystems, is present in rural Appalachia due to the fact that the mesosystems mentioned above interact with each other in a specific manner. These communities are often close-knit, in that most of their population is familiar with the lives and struggles of others (Welch, 2011). Thus, an individual’s family may pressure them to act or respond to a situation in a particular fashion in order to maintain a positive image within their community (Snyder, 2014).

Recall that the exosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory includes the influence that microsystems have on outside groups that an individual does not associate with on a regular basis. This is applicable to Appalachian culture in a few different ways. First, many individuals in rural Appalachia possess a significant level of mistrust for medical and behavioral health professionals (Coyne et al., 2006). This mistrust is often perpetuated by the experiences and opinions of previous generations. High levels of opioid addiction serve as another source of this distrust (Welch, 2011). Individuals may be wary of seeking medical help in fear of being prescribed a medication that could lead to addiction and/or assume that providers do not have their best long-term interests in mind when addressing issues. Finally, it has been found that many Appalachian residents feel that professionals practicing in rural areas are "second-rate" and not worth the time and expense involved in seeking their assistance (Welch, 2011).

The macrosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory is applicable to Appalachian culture as well, as the Region features deeply held beliefs and values. One of these beliefs is that family issues should be addressed within the home (Snyder, 2014). As such, individuals in Appalachia are hesitant to seek medical or behavioral health services because of their isolated communities and the fear that personal matters will quickly become public knowledge (Welch, 2011). Additionally, this is the layer where the values of a patriarchal society can be applied. Families in rural Appalachia place great emphasis on the idea that males are the family members that hold the most authority, while women are stereotypically more of the "passive" caretakers (Snyder, 2014). There is a difference in values between urban and rural areas, in that urban values are more egalitarian while rural values are more traditional (Parker et al., 2018).

As stated previously, the chronosystem is the layer that introduces the influence of time on the other four layers of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory. Recall the previous example of how teen motherhood presents obstacles that would not be in place for adult women. This is a common issue found in Appalachia. Due to the high value placed on family, it is common for individuals to start a family at a younger age, whether intentional or unplanned (Snyder, 2014). As such, it is also common to see younger individuals entering the workforce as early as possible, sometimes forgoing their academic career to do so (Snyder, 2014). While there are also individuals in more urbanized areas that experience these same major life events, they may have access to a larger support system and more community resources than their counterparts in Appalachia (Welch, 2011). These examples show that individuals in Appalachia are seemingly experiencing major life events at different ages than is typically found outside this Region. Furthermore, experiencing these events at earlier ages may result in additional or greater obstacles for them.

This section has established a foundation for understanding how Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory can be applied to perceptions of sexual assault (e.g., seeking resources, adherence to common rape myths) among different cultures. Each of the discussed layers can enlighten us on how a native of Appalachia may respond differently to being a victim of sexual assault than someone growing up in a different region of the country. These differing perceptions are the focus of the current study, which is discussed in detail below.

### **The Current Study**

The current study aims to identify a deficit in the knowledge of—and willingness to utilize—on-campus resources for sexual assault among Appalachian students. In addition, it explores whether Appalachian culture may serve to influence perceptions of common rape

myths. Six research questions are established, each with corresponding hypotheses. This section will further explain these research questions and hypotheses through the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory. A comprehensive summary of each can be found in Table 1.

**Research questions one and two.** The initial research questions focus on the notion that individual characteristics may play a role in college students' knowledge of and willingness to utilize on-campus sexual assault resources. The first hypothesis for each of these questions states that males will be less knowledgeable of, and less willing to utilize, on-campus resources for sexual assault. These hypotheses are supported by the macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological approach because it is a common belief that males are not sexually assaulted (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010); therefore, individuals may not realize that males also need to turn to resources available for sexual assault victims in the same manner as females.

Table 1.  
*Research Questions and Hypotheses*

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R<sub>1</sub>: Do individual characteristics play a role in the knowledge of on-campus resources for sexual assault?

H<sub>1</sub>: Males will be less knowledgeable of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>2</sub>: Lower classifications (in terms of year in school) of students will be less knowledgeable of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>3</sub>: First-generation college students will be less knowledgeable of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>4</sub>: Participation in student organizations will increase students' knowledge of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>5</sub>: College students living on campus will be more knowledgeable of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>6</sub>: College students who perceive the area they were raised as rural will be less knowledgeable of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

R<sub>2</sub>: Do individual characteristics play a role in willingness to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault?

H<sub>7</sub>: Males will be less willing to utilize on-campus sexual assault resources.

H<sub>8</sub>: Lower classifications (in terms of year in school) of students will be less willing to utilize on-campus sexual assault resources.

H<sub>9</sub>: First-generation college students will be less willing to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>10</sub>: Participation in student organizations will increase students' willingness to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>11</sub>: College students living on campus will be more willing to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>12</sub>: College students who perceive the area they were raised as rural will be less willing to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault.

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

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R<sub>3</sub>: Do individual characteristics play a role in likelihood of subscribing to common rape myths?

H<sub>13</sub>: Males will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths.

H<sub>14</sub>: Lower classifications (in terms of year in school) of students will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths.

H<sub>15</sub>: First-generation college students will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths.

H<sub>16</sub>: Participation in student organizations will decrease students' likelihood of subscribing to common rape myths.

H<sub>17</sub>: College students living on campus will be less likely to subscribe to common rape myths.

H<sub>18</sub>: College students who perceive the area they were raised as rural will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths.

R<sub>4</sub>: Does a relationship exist between Appalachian culture and knowledge of on-campus resources for sexual assault?

H<sub>19</sub>: Students who identify as Appalachian will be less knowledgeable of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>20</sub>: Students who were raised in Appalachia will be less knowledgeable of on-campus resources for sexual assault.

R<sub>5</sub>: Does a relationship exist between Appalachian culture and willingness to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault?

H<sub>21</sub>: Students who identify as Appalachian will be less likely to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault.

H<sub>22</sub>: Students who were raised in Appalachia will be less willing to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault.

R<sub>6</sub>: Does a relationship exist between Appalachian culture and subscribing to common rape myths?

H<sub>23</sub>: Students who identify as Appalachian will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths.

H<sub>24</sub>: Students who were raised in Appalachia will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths.

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The second hypotheses state that students with a lower classification (i.e., freshmen or sophomores) at a university will be less knowledgeable of and less willing to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault. Support for these hypotheses can be found in the chronosystem layer of the framework, as it addresses the influence of time on development. As such, a first- or second-year college student may have less exposure to resources available to students, including those for victims of campus sexual assault, than a student with a higher classification.

The third hypotheses postulate that first-generation college students will be less knowledgeable and less willing to utilize on-campus resources for sexual assault. The mesosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory is applicable to these hypotheses in that family members are not able to provide these students with insight prior to arriving on campus. The parents of these students are not familiar with college campuses or resources available to students, leaving them no way of properly preparing their children for what they will experience.

Next, it is hypothesized that students who are involved in campus social organizations will be more knowledgeable of, and more willing to utilize, on-campus resources. Support for these hypotheses can be derived from the microsystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory, as it points to the importance of various social systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986; 1995). Participation in social organizations on campus provides students with a strong support group that could encourage the student to reach out to campus resources in the event of victimization.

The fifth hypotheses for these research questions state that students who live on campus will be more knowledgeable of and more willing to utilize on-campus sexual assault resources. Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) first layer of development, the microsystem, can also be

used as support for these hypotheses because students living on campus may become part of a group of students that live in the same residence hall or even students that live on the same floor of their residence hall. This could lead to a more intimate and accessible support system for these students, which in turn may increase their willingness to turn to school resources in the event that they are needed.

Finally, the sixth hypotheses suggest that students who perceive the area they were raised as rural will be less knowledgeable of and less willing to utilize campus sexual assault resources as opposed to students who perceive the area they were raised as urban. These hypotheses can be supported by Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) macrosystem because of the unique set of beliefs and values that can be found among individuals that reside in rural communities (Snyder, 2014). Research has shown that rural culture impacts perceptions of sexual assault, as well as sexual assault resources (Burt, 1980; Coyne et al., 2006; Haywood & Swank, 2008). As such, it would seem logical to assume that those growing up in a rural area would be less knowledgeable/willing even when entering the college environment.

**Research question three.** The third research question involves the role that individual characteristics play on students' likelihood of subscribing to common rape myths. The hypotheses that correspond to this question are similar to those for the first two research questions. The first hypothesis is that males will be more likely than females to subscribe to common rape myths. This is supported by Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) macrosystem layer of development because of the traditional gender roles that may be taught to individuals living in the Appalachian Region (Snyder, 2014).

The second hypothesis for this research question suggests that students at lower classifications will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths than their higher



classification counterparts. Similar to research questions one and two, this hypothesis corresponds to Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) chronosystem layer of development because the amount of time spent in a university setting would, in theory, increase a student's exposure to experiences and viewpoints that contradict traditional ways of thinking.

Third, it is hypothesized that first-generation students will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths. Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) macrosystem layer of development is supportive of this hypothesis due to the increased likelihood that parents of these students will pass down more traditional beliefs and values regarding sexual activity (Snyder, 2014). Students whose parents have a college education tend to have more exposure to varying viewpoints, thus giving them more opportunities to adopt viewpoints that oppose common rape myths (Burt, 1980; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010).

The next hypothesis states that students who are involved in student organizations will be less likely to subscribe to rape myths. This hypothesis is supported by Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) microsystem and macrosystem layers of development. Being a part of different student organizational groups allows for greater exposure to information about various topics as well as viewpoints that may differ from those held by a student's family members.

For the fifth hypothesis, it is suggested that students who live on campus will be less likely to subscribe to common rape myths than students living off-campus. Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) microsystem and macrosystem layers of development are supportive of this hypothesis due to the presence of other students in their residence hall. Similar to the fourth hypothesis, students living together on campus expose each other to viewpoints different from those passed to them by their parents.

The final hypothesis for this research question states that students who perceive the area they were raised as rural will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths than students who perceive the area they were raised as urban. The macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory supports this hypothesis because the students who were raised in a rural area may have beliefs and values passed down to them that differ from the beliefs and values passed down to students who were raised in a more urban setting.

**Research questions four and five.** The fourth and fifth research questions focus specifically on Appalachian students' perceptions of on-campus resources for sexual assault. There are two hypotheses for each of these research questions. The first set state that students who identify as Appalachian (via adherence to common Regional values) will be less knowledgeable of, and less willing to utilize, resources for campus sexual assault, as will those simply raised within the Region. The macrosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory is most applicable to these hypotheses. The adherence to traditional gender roles commonly found in rural Appalachia (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014; Rennison et al., 2012; Swank et al., 2011) could influence an Appalachian student's perceptions of sexual assault and willingness to seek out resources.

Furthermore, the normalization of spousal abuse and rape in Appalachia (Rennison et al., 2012) could play a role in an Appalachian student's willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources. Put differently, those from Appalachia could be socialized into a mindset that victimization is simply a part of life (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). The exosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory can support these hypotheses. Recall that there is a distrust among Appalachian individuals toward medical providers and individuals in a position

of authority (Snyder, 2014). This distrust can follow an individual from their home environment to the campus setting and extend to avoiding those at the institution who may be able to help.

**Research question six.** The study's final research question addresses whether Appalachian students exhibit a higher adherence to common rape myths than those from other cultural backgrounds. Similar to research questions four and five, there are two hypotheses that correspond to this research question. The first suggests that students who identify as Appalachian via a cultural scale will be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths, while the second postulates that students raised in the Appalachian region will also be more likely to do so. The macrosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory supports these hypotheses because the value of traditional gender roles and normalization of intimate partner sexual assault that is commonly found in Appalachia may perpetuate these rape myths in the Region.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter served to provide an examination of on-campus sexual assault resources and students' knowledge of/willingness to use these resources. In addition, it chronicled the policies that have been created to guide educational institutions in responding to sexual assault. Though beneficial, such policies do not ensure that students will turn to available resources in the event that they are needed. This may be specifically true for those who were raised with traditional Appalachian values, as the Region features high rates of sexual assault and has been found to embrace common rape myths. In light of this, the chapter discussed Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory and its potential application to the problem. A series of research questions were established (each with corresponding hypotheses) to test this applicability. The next chapter will discuss the manner in which these questions were tested.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

The previous chapter provided an overview of the literature regarding campus sexual assault prevalence and resources. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory of development was introduced, with a specific focus on its potential application to the topic at hand. The current study strives to enhance the literature by seeking to determine whether adherence to Appalachian norms serves to impact knowledge and perceptions of campus sexual assault resources. This chapter will discuss the study's methodology, including the sampling strategy, survey instrument and various measures that were assessed. Additionally, the various analyses that were conducted will be covered.

#### **Data**

**Sample.** Participants for the current study were drawn from a public university located within the State of Tennessee. The University offers approximately 140 degree programs at the bachelors, masters and doctoral levels and features a student population of over 14,000. Its location within the heart of the Appalachian Region, in addition to its focus on welcoming first-generation students, presented the opportunity to adequately explore the various research questions associated with the study.

Sampling occurred in stages. First, six (6) majors were selected from those offered by the University via simple random sampling and the use of a random number generator. Next, the complete list of offered courses (for the Fall 2019 academic term) was drawn for each of the selected majors using data available from the University's registrar. Because survey administration occurred in person, only on-campus courses were considered. Through a stratified approach, these courses were separated into four categories (within each major) based upon the level of the offering (1000-, 2000-, 3000- and 4000-level courses). One class was randomly

selected from each level in order to ensure that the sample featured variation in terms of student classification (e.g., freshman, senior). As such, 24 classes across six majors were selected for participation.

Approval to survey the students in the selected classes was requested through an email sent to instructors. A total of 18 of the instructors responded to the email request, with 12 granting permission to survey their class. Once approval was granted, surveys were administered to the students in person at the beginning of the respective class period. Of the 12 classes surveyed for this study, there were three classes at every course level (1000, 2000, 3000, and 4000). Only students over the age of 18 were permitted to complete the survey. They were informed that participation in the current study was voluntary and that they could choose to cease completion of the survey at any time. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic at hand, respondents were only asked about their current knowledge and perceptions, not their personal experiences. Additionally, passive consent was obtained and no identifying information (e.g., names, student identification numbers) was requested. To further ensure anonymity, students were asked to place their completed surveys face down on a table at the front of each classroom. These surveys were shuffled by the researcher prior to placing them within an envelope. Finally, each student was provided a list of available campus resources in the event they experienced any stress or discomfort as a result of completing the survey.

**Survey instrument.** The survey instrument consisted of four separate sections including the various measures needed to answer the established research questions: (1) demographics, (2) Appalachian identity, (3) knowledge and perceptions of campus sexual assault resources, and (4) adherence to common rape myths (see Appendix One for the complete survey). Completion of the survey took approximately 10-15 minutes. The initial section included 12 demographic

questions (e.g. age, school classification). These questions were chosen in line with previous research and in order to allow for a test of the various levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory.

The second section included 16 statements that focused on the respondents' cultural upbringing, with a specific focus on adherence to Appalachian culture and the values associated with it. The Likert-scale responses for each statement (ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree) served to assess the degree to which an individual subscribes to these values. Example items include perceptions of education, closeness to one's family and community, and belief in fatalism (e.g., experiences occurring because it is what God intends). The scale was originally developed by Wetzel (2005) in her work on the prevalence of intimate partner violence in Appalachia. Though the original scale consisted of 20 items, four were removed for the purposes of the current study due to their lack of applicability to the various layers of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) framework.

Section three encompassed 16 Likert-scale items (ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree) assessing respondents' knowledge of and willingness to use on-campus sexual assault resources. Nine of the statements assessed knowledge of resources, while six statements addressed willingness to utilize them. Statements were derived from requirements placed upon institutions of higher education by the Department of Education (2011). Though they vary in content, example items include knowing where to file a sexual assault report on campus, whether respondents have received any sexual assault education from the University, and whether they would be comfortable disclosing a sexual assault to various individuals. It is important to note that none of the statements in this section pertained to personal experiences

regarding sexual assault, as the current study seeks only to understand perceptions and willingness from a hypothetical point of view.

Finally, the fourth section of the survey consisted of 16 Likert-scale items (ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree) that asked about respondents' perceptions of sexual activity. These items were designed to determine whether respondents adhere to common rape myths that have been discussed within the research literature (Colby College, 2019; King & Roberts, 2011; Swank et al., 2011). Various hypothetical scenarios illustrating common rape myths and focusing on issues relating to consent, the presence of alcohol, and traditional gender roles were included. The items are based upon the work of McMahon and Farmer (2011), though the phrasing of several scenarios was adjusted in order to increase the likelihood that respondents would answer honestly.

## **Measures**

### **Independent measures.**

**Demographics.** Several demographic measures were assessed within this study, with each relating to one or more layers within Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory of development. The first measure, *gender*, was operationalized categorically, with respondents selecting one of the following responses: (1) male, (2), female, (3) non-binary, or (4) other. The number of respondents that selected "non-binary" or "other" was low, so the measure was dichotomized (0= male; 1= female), with responses of "non-binary" and "other" being treated as missing data. *Age*, the second demographic measure, was open-ended and measured continuously due to the fact that the student population likely featured little variation for the measure (making categorical options counterproductive).

Two measures were utilized to gauge the geographical backgrounds of respondents. The first identified whether respondents were raised in the Appalachian Region (*Appalachian origin*). Dichotomous answer options were provided (0=no; 1=yes), and individuals who completed the survey were provided a list of counties considered part of the Region in order to ensure validity. Though the Region is largely rural, several densely-populated areas are present within it. A second measure, *residency perception*, was also included and asked the respondents to indicate the type of community in which they were raised. The measure was matched to the following response options: (1) rural community, (2) small town, (3) large town, (4) small city, and (5) large city. Prior to analysis this measure was dichotomized, with rural community and small town being categorized as (1) rural, while the remaining categories were categorized as (2) urban. This allowed for a clear distinction between rural and urban areas to aid in analysis.

The next set of demographic measures related specifically to the college setting. *School classification* was measured via the following categories: (1) freshman, (2) sophomore, (3) junior, (4) senior, (5) graduate student, or (6) other. The “other” category was provided in the event that some respondents were dual-enrollees or auditing courses. For purposes of the analysis, all “graduate student” and “other responses” were not included in the dataset. *First-generation student* was determined by whether the respondent is the first person in their immediate family (e.g., parents, siblings) to attend college. Responses for this question were categorized as: (1) yes, (2) no, or (3) unsure. Because students who answered “no” or “unsure” may have similar attitudes or levels of preparation in terms of higher education, these responses were dichotomized (0= no or unsure; 1= yes) prior to analysis.

Because Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory stresses the importance of belonging to groups and interacting with other individuals, it was necessary to determine if



respondents *live on or off campus*. The responses for this question were dichotomous in nature (0=off campus; 1=on campus). Additionally, two survey questions were used to assess respondents' level of involvement within the campus community. The first related to athletic participation and queried whether individuals were a member of a University sports team (e.g., basketball, football). Respondents were provided with two options (0=no; 1=yes). The second asked respondents to indicate whether they were involved in various organizations on campus. Six types of organizations (academic clubs, activity clubs, Greek life organizations, faith-based organizations, service organizations, and residence life organizations) were included, and respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they are involved in each type. Responses for type of organization were also dichotomous in nature and allowed respondents to select no (0) or yes (1). Since Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory does not state that being involved in multiple organizations is more beneficial than being involved in one organization, this measure was dichotomized into the following categories prior to analysis: (0) no involvement and (1) involvement in at least one organization.

***Appalachian identity.*** As previously stated, *Appalachian identity* was measured via a modified version of Wetzel's (2005) scale consisting of 16 statements that coincide with beliefs and ideologies commonly found among residents of rural Appalachia (see Table #2 for a complete list of these statements). Respondents were asked to rate how much they agree with each statement in line with the following Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neutral, (4) somewhat agree, or (5) strongly agree. Because each of these items is thought to be measuring a similar concept, creation of the *Appalachian identity* score involved adding respondent scores for all items and then dividing that figure by 16. In the event that there was missing data in one or more measures comprising the scale, the aggregated score was

calculated in the following manner: values for available responses were divided by the number of items answered. This created a continuous measure ranging from one (1) at the lowest end to five (5) at the highest end. A reliability analysis (using Cronbach's alpha) was performed to ensure that all items within the scale were indeed measuring the same concept (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 2.

*Appalachian Identity Scale*

---

I don't feel you can trust someone unless you know their family

It is important for me to live in a place where I have "roots"

Things happen the way God intends

I am very close to my family

I was raised in the Appalachian Region

I have a hard time trusting people who are not from my community

My religious beliefs tell me to accept what happens as God's will

I grew up in a community where education was not highly valued

In my community there is a strong emphasis on tradition

I believe that tried and true ways of doing things are the best

The values in my community are different from the rest of the country

I feel very attached to my family

I am highly involved in my community

Most of the people in my community have a sense of common history

My relationships with kin (or kinfolk) are stronger than my relationship with friends

Most of the people in my community know my family

---

***Adherence to rape myths.*** The final independent measure (*rape myth adherence*) assessed the degree to which respondents conformed to rape myths commonly held in society. Similar to *Appalachian identity*, this measure was derived from a scale that consisted of 16 statements (see Table #3 for a complete list), each with response options ranging from (1)

strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Each statement relates to a hypothetical scenario that coincides with common rape myths. Scores for this measure were calculated in the same manner as the *Appalachian identity* measure (dividing the cumulative value by 16). In addition, a similar reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was performed to assess the consistency of this scale.

Table 3.  
*Rape Myth Scale*

---

It is acceptable for a person to get upset if their partner agrees to sexual activity by then later changed their mind

It is still consensual sex if a person changes their mind and wants to stop in the middle of the encounter, but their partner chooses to continue

Many girls pretend they do not want sex because they do not want to appear 'easy'

If a person is raped while they are drunk, they may be somewhat responsible for placing themselves in a vulnerable situation

When a person says no to sex what they really mean is maybe

People often lie about being sexually assaulted

A person can consent to sexual activity if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol

If a person does not physically fight back, then they cannot say they were raped

When a person asks their date back to their place, it is likely that something sexual will happen

It is okay for a person to assume that their partner wants to have sex if they have been dating for a long time

When girls go to parties in revealing clothing they are asking for trouble

A person can assume their intimate partner wants to have sex at any time

Men cannot be raped or sexually assaulted

If a person does not say no, they cannot say they have been raped

Males have a difficult time controlling their sexual urges

Most people cannot afford to use victim services for sexual assault (such as counseling, medical treatment, or legal services)

---

**Dependent measures.** Three dependent measures were utilized in the current study. The first related to student *knowledge* of campus sexual assault resources. Nine Likert-scale items assessing knowledge of available resources and the process of filing a sexual assault report were used to create this measure (see Table #4 for a complete list). Responses for these items were as follows: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neutral, (4) somewhat agree, and (5) strongly agree.

Table 4.

*Knowledge Scale*

---

I have received education about rape or sexual assault while in college

I have seen literature (such as a flyer) posted on campus for campus sexual assault resources

I know what Title IX is

I know the role of the Title IX Coordinator

I know where to find the contact information for the Title IX Coordinator

I know where to go on campus to file a sexual assault report

I am familiar with the procedures of reporting a sexual assault on campus

I am familiar with the different types of reports that can be filed on campus regarding sexual assault

I know where the counseling center is located on campus

---

The second dependent measure related to willingness to use available resources (*willingness*) and was created via six items that assessed respondents' level of comfort in filing a sexual assault report or reaching out to various campus entities should they need to (see Table #5 for a complete list). Similar to the items assessing *knowledge* of resources, responses for these seven items ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Table 5.

*Willingness Scale*

---

I am comfortable talking to university administrative staff and campus authorities

I would be comfortable going to the counseling center after a sexual assault

I would be comfortable disclosing a sexual assault to a friend

I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to an instructor or professor on campus

I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to a campus administrator

I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to a campus police officer

---

The final measure was the scale for rape myth adherence (previously discussed) as it was used as both an independent and dependent measure within the study. Responses for the individual items (for all three scales) were aggregated and then divided by the total number of items comprising each scale. A reliability test was conducted in order to ensure that each was measuring similar constructs.

**Plan of Analysis**

The established hypotheses for the current study were tested through four separate stages. The initial stage was a reliability analysis designed to assess whether the scales for *Appalachian identity*, *rape myth adherence*, *knowledge* and *willingness* were suitable for inclusion within the later regression models (to be discussed). Values for Cronbach's alpha were computed for each scale, with acceptable scores (.70 or above) indicating that all items were measuring a similar construct.

Following this, stage two involved the calculation of various descriptive statistics designed to provide an understanding of the collected data. The data from this analysis allowed for an initial look at sample demographics, scores for all scales, and a basic knowledge of student's perceptions of and willingness to utilize sexual assault resources. The third stage of analysis consisted of a series of bivariate correlations. Computing these correlations provided an

exploratory understanding of the relationship between all independent and dependent variables. It also presented the opportunity to test for multicollinearity. Multicollinearity occurs when two (or more) variables appear to be measuring a similar factor and can lead to biased results when conducting multivariate analysis if not addressed (Grewal, Cote & Baumgartner, 2004). In addition, results from the correlation analyses allowed for the sixth research question relating to the relationship between *Appalachian identity* and *rape myth adherence* to be answered.

Multivariate statistics were calculated in the final stage of the analysis. Three separate linear (OLS) regression models were utilized in the current study. The first two regression models were conducted in order to explore the impact that the various independent variables had on *knowledge* and *willingness*. The third regression aimed to examine whether the independent measures influenced a student's likelihood of adhering to common rape myths.

### **Chapter Summary**

The current chapter served to provide an overview of the study's methodology and how it allowed for an assessment of the various research questions guiding this work. The chapter began by detailing the content of the survey instrument, the population that was studied, and the strategy through which respondents were selected from this population. Descriptions of both the independent measures (demographics, rape myth adherence and Appalachian identity) and dependent measures (knowledge of and willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources, rape myth adherence) were also provided. Finally, the chapter discussed the plan of analysis and how it allowed for the established hypotheses to be tested. The following chapter will detail the results of the various analyses that were conducted for the current study.

## Chapter 4. Results

This chapter serves to address the results of the statistical analyses that were detailed in the previous chapter. First, an overview of the univariate statistics (for the independent measures) will be provided to allow for a better understanding of the sample and its characteristics. Next, attention will be directed to the creation of the four scales that are utilized in this study and the reliability statistics associated with them. Following this will be a presentation of the bivariate correlations and the results of three multivariate regression models.

### Univariate Statistics

A total of 367 surveys were distributed to students in the 12 classes that were included in the sample. Thirty-three students chose not to participate, bringing the total number of completed surveys to 334. Seven of the completed surveys were not included because those respondents had significant missing data on at least one of the four scales. Nineteen surveys were also removed because the respondents did not meet the criteria of being an undergraduate student and/or were raised primarily outside of the United States. Eliminating these surveys left a final sample of 308 participants.

Frequencies were calculated in order to obtain a better understanding of the sample characteristics (see Table #6 for a complete list). The measures included *gender*, *Appalachian origin*, *residency perception*, *school classification*, *first-generation student*, *live on or off campus*, and *student involvement*. The data revealed that 61.4% of the respondents were female, while 37.0% were male. Additionally, 80.5% of respondents were raised in the Appalachian region, with the balance raised outside of it. This finding is not wholly surprising considering the geographical size of the Region and the location of the University. In relation to respondents'

residency perception, 45.1% of the respondents perceived the area they were raised in as rural, with the remainder believing that the area they were raised in was urban.

The remaining measures pertained to characteristics involving various aspects of respondents' college lifestyle. Freshmen constituted 31.2% of the sample, 24.4% were sophomores, 18.8% were juniors, and 25.6% were seniors. When examining how many respondents were first-generation college students, 25.6% indicated that they were, while 73.7% indicated they were not, or that they were unsure (0.6% chose not to answer the question). Additionally, 28.2% of respondents lived on-campus and 71.8% lived off-campus. Finally, in relation to student involvement, 56.2% of respondents indicated that they were involved in at least one organization.

Table 6.  
*Frequencies*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	114	37.00
Female	189	61.40
Missing	5	1.60
Appalachian Origin		
Yes	248	80.50
No	60	19.50
Missing	0	0.00
Residency Perception		
Rural	139	45.10
Urban	169	54.90
Missing	0	0.00
School Classification		
Freshman	96	31.20
Sophomore	75	24.40
Junior	58	18.80
Senior	79	25.60
Missing	0	0.00
First-generation Student		
Yes	79	25.60
No/Unsure	227	73.70
Missing	2	0.60

(continued)



Table 6 (continued)

Live on- or off-campus		
on-campus	87	28.20
Off-campus	221	71.80
Missing	0	0.00
Student Involvement		
At least one organization	173	56.20
None	135	43.80
Missing	0	0.00

### Scale Statistics

**Appalachian identity.** As stated in the previous chapter, four scales were utilized in the current study. The first measured respondents' level of Appalachian identity. A reliability test was conducted to determine the consistency of the scale. The value for this scale ( $\alpha=.77$ ) was above the reliability score deemed sufficient (.70), indicating that it is a reliable method of assessing Appalachian identity. Each respondent was given a standardized score (ranging from 1 to 5) based on their responses to each item in the scale. A score of (1) indicated the lowest possible level of Appalachian identity while a score of (5) indicated the highest level of Appalachian identity. Actual response values ranged from 1.00 to 4.50, with an overall mean of 3.12 (see Table #7). This suggests that, overall, there was a moderate level of Appalachian identity present among the students who participated in the current study.

Table 7.  
*Appalachian Identity Scale Scores*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Appalachian Scale	1.00	4.50	3.12

Assessing the descriptive statistics for the specific items in the Appalachian identity scale revealed some findings of importance (see Table #8 for a complete list of Appalachian identity scale statistics). For instance, *being very close to family* and *being raised in the Appalachian*

region presented the highest scores, with means of 4.27 and 4.08 respectively. *Feeling very attached to family* (M=3.96) and *believing things happen the way that God intends* (M=3.64) were the next highest indicators of Appalachian identity. Conversely, the two items with the lowest mean values were *not being able to trust people outside of their community* (M= 1.93) and *grew up in an area where education was not valued* (M=2.03). *Not being able to trust people unless you know their family* and *being highly involved in your community* were the next two lowest items in this scale, with means of 2.20 and 2.81 respectively.

Table 8.  
*Appalachian Identity Descriptive Statistics*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
I don't feel you can trust someone unless you know their family	1.00	5.00	2.20
It is important for me to live in a place where I have "roots"	1.00	5.00	2.90
Things happen the way God intends	1.00	5.00	3.64
I am very close to my family	1.00	5.00	4.27
I was raised in the Appalachian region	1.00	5.00	4.08
I have a hard time trusting people who are not from my community	1.00	5.00	1.93
My religious beliefs tell me to accept what happens as God's will	1.00	5.00	3.35
I grew up in a community where education was not highly valued	1.00	5.00	2.03
In my community there is a strong emphasis on tradition	1.00	5.00	3.42
I believe that tried and true ways of doing things are the best	1.00	5.00	3.12
The values in my community are different from the rest of the country	1.00	5.00	2.82

(continued)

Table 8 (continued)

I feel very attached to my family	1.00	5.00	3.96
I am highly involved in my community	1.00	5.00	2.81
Most of the people in my community have a sense of common history	1.00	5.00	3.36
My relationships with kin (or kinfolk) are stronger than my relationships with the friends	1.00	5.00	2.89
Most of the people in my community know my family	1.00	5.00	3.21

**Knowledge of sexual assault resources.** A reliability test was also conducted for the *knowledge* scale, with the resulting Alpha score ( $\alpha=.85$ ) signifying that the scale was a reliable measure for this variable. A standardized score was created for each respondent, with (1) indicating the least knowledge of resources and (5) indicating the most knowledge of resources. The calculated mean for the sample was 2.80 (see Table #9), indicating that respondents had low to moderate knowledge of on-campus sexual assault resources.

Table 9.  
*Knowledge Scale Scores*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Knowledge Scale	1.00	5.00	2.80

Descriptive statistics were also calculated for the individual items in this scale (see Table #10). For this measure, it was indicated that *seeing literature posted on campus* (M=4.08) and *receiving education about sexual assault while in college* (M=4.02) were the items that students agreed with the most. In contrast, the descriptive statistics showed that *knowing where to find the contact information for the Title IX Coordinator* and *knowing the role of the Title IX Coordinator* featured the lowest values, with mean scores of 1.87 and 1.98 respectively.

Table 10.  
*Knowledge Descriptive Statistics*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
I have received education about rape or sexual assault while in college	1.00	5.00	4.02
I have seen literature posted on campus for campus sexual assault resources	1.00	5.00	4.08
I know what Title IX is	1.00	5.00	2.54
I know the role of the Title IX Coordinator	1.00	5.00	1.98
I know where to find the contact information for the Title IX Coordinator	1.00	5.00	1.87
I know where to go on campus to file a sexual assault report	1.00	5.00	2.60
I am familiar with the procedures for reporting a sexual assault on campus	1.00	5.00	2.57
I am familiar with the different types of reports that can be filed on campus regarding sexual assault	1.00	5.00	2.42
I know where the counseling center is located on campus	1.00	5.00	3.18

**Willingness to utilize sexual assault resources.** The third scale used in the current study related to student willingness to utilize campus resources. This scale was also deemed to be a reliable measure with an Alpha score of .86. Similar to the other scales, respondents were given a standardized score, with a score of (1) indicating the lowest amount of willingness to utilize resources while a score of (5) indicated the highest amount of willingness to utilize resources. The mean score for the willingness scale was 3.32, indicating that, overall, respondents reported they would be moderately willing to use campus resources for sexual assault.

Table 11.  
*Willingness Scale Scores*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Willingness Scale	1.00	5.00	3.32

Respondents indicated that they would be most *comfortable disclosing a sexual assault to a friend* (M=3.70) and *reporting a sexual assault to campus police* (M=3.57). Conversely, the items respondents reporting having the least comfort with were *reporting a sexual assault to an instructor or professor* (M=2.99) and *reporting a sexual assault to a campus administrator* (M=2.96). Please see Table 12 for a complete summary of the item results.

Table 12.  
*Willingness Descriptive Statistics*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
I would be comfortable talking to university administrative staff and campus authorities	1.00	5.00	3.51
I would be comfortable going to the counseling center after a sexual assault	1.00	5.00	3.20
I would be comfortable disclosing a sexual assault to a friend	1.00	5.00	3.70
I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to an instructor or professor on campus	1.00	5.00	2.99
I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to a campus administrator	1.00	5.00	2.96
I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to a campus police officer	1.00	5.00	3.57

**Rape myth adherence.** The final scale utilized in the current study addressed *rape myth adherence*. The Alpha score ( $\alpha=.81$ ) again indicated that the scale was a sufficient measure for this variable. Respondents were given an overall aggregated score (ranging from 1 to 5)

depending on their responses to the items in the scale. A score of (1) demonstrated a low adherence to rape myths while a score of (5) showed a high adherence to rape myths. Actual response values for this scale ranged from 1.00 to 4.19, with the mean score (M=1.90) indicating an overall lower adherence to common rape myths among the sample population.

Table 13.  
*Rape Myth Adherence Scale Scores*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Rape Myth Scale	1.00	4.19	1.90

Descriptive statistics for the individual items in this scale show that responses fell into the low or moderate range across most indicators (see Table #13 for a complete list of rape myth scale statistics). The items with the highest scores were that *most people cannot afford to use victim services for sexual assault* (M=3.08) and *people often lie about being sexually assaulted* (M=2.78). These items were followed closely by *something sexual is likely when someone invites their date back to their place* (M=2.54) and *many girls pretend they do not want sex because they do not want to appear 'easy'* (M=2.52). In contrast, there were four scale items that featured somewhat lower mean scores. Analysis of the data revealed that *when a person says no to sex what they really mean is maybe* (M=1.12) and *it is not rape if a person does not physically fight back* (M=1.23) had the lowest scores. *Men cannot be raped or sexually assaulted* (M=1.25) and *it is still consensual sex if a person changes their mind and wants to stop, but their partner chooses to continue* (M=1.34) featured the next lowest scores.

Table 14.

*Rape Myth Adherence Descriptive Statistics*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
It is acceptable for a person to get upset if their partner agrees to sexual activity but then later changes their mind	1.00	5.00	1.88
It is still consensual sex if a person changes their mind and wants to stop in the middle of the encounter, but their partner chooses to continue	1.00	5.00	1.34
Many girls pretend they do not want sex because they do not want to appear 'easy'	1.00	5.00	2.52
If a person is raped while they are drunk, they may be somewhat responsible for placing themselves in a vulnerable situation	1.00	5.00	1.74
When a person says no to sex what they really mean is maybe	1.00	5.00	1.12
People often lie about being sexually assaulted	1.00	5.00	2.78
A person can consent to sexual activity if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol	1.00	5.00	1.96
If a person does not physically fight back, then they cannot say they were raped	1.00	5.00	1.23
When a person asks their date back to their place, it is likely that something sexual will happen	1.00	5.00	2.54
It is okay for a person to assume that their partner wants to have sex if they have been dating for a long time	1.00	5.00	1.75
When girls go to parties in revealing clothing they are asking for trouble	1.00	5.00	1.72
A person can assume their intimate partner wants to have sex at any time	1.00	5.00	1.49
Men cannot be raped or sexually assaulted	1.00	5.00	1.25
If a person does not say no, they cannot say they have been raped	1.00	5.00	1.68
Males have a difficult time controlling their sexual urges	1.00	5.00	2.38
Most people cannot afford to use victim services for sexual assault	1.00	5.00	3.08

## Bivariate Correlations

A series of bivariate correlations were calculated in order to provide an initial assessment of the existing relationships between the various independent and dependent variables. Bivariate correlations are beneficial because they determine the direction, strength, and significance of relationships that exist between two measures. Additionally, they allow for the examination of any presence of multicollinearity before proceeding to the multivariate stage of analysis. It is important to test for multicollinearity to ensure that each item measures a unique factor. Upon review multicollinearity was not deemed an issue in the current study.

Results of the bivariate analysis revealed several significant relationships at both the .05 and .01 levels. Table 14 provides a full summary of these results. *Student involvement* showed a weak, positive relationship with *Appalachian identity* ( $r=.14$ ). A weak, negative relationship was found between *adherence to rape myths* and *willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources* ( $r=-.12$ ). A moderate, positive relationship emerged between *willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources* and *knowledge of campus sexual assault resources* ( $r=.34$ ). The strongest relationship, although still moderate, existed between *school classification* and *living on or off campus* ( $r=-.38$ ). The negative direction of the relationship indicates that students of higher classifications (e.g., juniors and seniors) are less likely to live on campus.



Table 15.  
*Bivariate Correlations*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Appalachian scale	--										
2. Student involvement	.14*	--									
3. Gender	.12*	.11	--								
4. First-generation student	-.03	.03	.10	--							
5. Live on/off campus	-.21	.23**	.08	.06	--						
6. School classification	-.01	-.04	-.11	-.02	-.38**	--					
7. Appalachian origin	.36**	-.09	-.02	-.01	-.13*	.05	--				
8. Residency perception	.21**	-.04	.06	.07	-.05	-.02	.23**	--			
9. Knowledge of resources	.01	.10	-.06	-.01	.07	.02	-.03	-.05	--		
10. Willingness to utilize resources	.04	.01	-.11	-.18**	-.05	.09	.03	-.02	.34**	--	
11. Adherence to rape myths	.26**	-.00	-.23**	.09	-.04	-.07	.14*	.08	-.11	-.12*	--

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

The sixth research question focused on the relationship between *Appalachian identity* and *rape myth adherence*. Hypothesis 23 stated that students with a higher adherence to traditional Appalachian values would be more likely to adhere to common rape myths. Results from the bivariate analysis revealed a weak, positive relationship between the two measures ( $r = .26$ ;  $p < .01$ ), providing support for this assertion. Additionally, Hypothesis 24 posited that students who were raised in Appalachia would be more likely to adhere to common rape myths. Results were significant at the .05 level, showing a weak positive relationship ( $r = .14$ ). Based upon these findings, both *Appalachian origin* and *Appalachian identity* appear to increase adherence to common rape myths. Having detailed the bivariate relationships, attention is now turned to the multivariate models.

## Multivariate Analysis

**Knowledge of resources.** The first linear regression model explored student knowledge of campus sexual assault resources and allowed for research questions one and four to be answered. Table 16 shows a summary of the results for this model. The overall model was not statistically significant ( $F=0.90$ ;  $p=.52$ ), with the adjusted r-squared value revealing that the included predictors are not sufficient to predict student knowledge of campus sexual assault resources. Furthermore, no statistically significant relationships emerged. As such, the various hypotheses associated with the two research questions are not supported through the results of this analysis.

Table 16.  
*Knowledge Regression Model*

Variable	B	SE	Significance
Residency perception	-.08	.11	.49
School classification	.03	.05	.54
First-generation student	-.03	.12	.82
Student involvement	.17	.11	.14
Gender	-.13	.11	.25
Appalachian origin	-.08	.15	.57
Live on/off campus	.14	.13	.30
Appalachian identity	.07	.11	.52
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-.00		

Note: \* $p<0.05$ ; \*\* $p<0.01$

**Willingness to utilize resources.** The second linear regression model sought to explore the relationship between individual characteristics and willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources ( $R_2$  and  $R_5$ ). This model proved to be statistically significant ( $F=2.20$ ;  $p=.03$ ), with the adjusted r-squared value showing that the included predictors explained approximately three percent (3%) of the variation in willingness to utilize on-campus sexual assault resources. With that said, only *first-generation student* ( $\beta=-.40$ ) emerged as statistically significant. This is

supportive of Hypothesis 9, though on the whole it appears as if individual characteristics may not be the best predictors of the outcome in question (see Table #17 for the summary of the willingness regression model).

Table 17.  
*Willingness Regression Model*

Variable	B	SE	Significance
Residency perception	-.02	.11	.88
School classification	.06	.05	.21
First-generation student	-.40**	.12	.00
Student involvement	.07	.11	.55
Gender	-.16	.11	.15
Appalachian origin	.03	.15	.84
Live on/off campus	-.02	.13	.86
Appalachian identity	.08	.10	.47
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.03		

Note: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

**Rape myth adherence.** The final linear regression model involved exploring the relationship between individual characteristics and adherence to common rape myths (R<sub>3</sub> and R<sub>6</sub>). The overall model was statistically significant (F=6.89; p=.00). The adjusted r-squared value for this model revealed that the combined predictors explained approximately 14 percent (14%) of the variation in adherence to common rape myths. Table 18 shows a full summary of the results for this analysis.

Table 18.  
*Rape Myth Adherence Regression Model*

Variable	$\beta$	SE	Significance
Residency perception	.02	.07	.81
School classification	-.06	.03	.06
First generation student	.17*	.07	.02
Student involvement	-.01	.07	.88
Gender	-.34**	.07	.00
Appalachian origin	.05	.09	.59
Live on/off campus	-.07	.08	.36
Appalachian identity	.28**	.06	.00
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.14		

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

Three predictors emerged as statistically significant within the model. *First-generation student* ( $\beta = .17$ ) featured a positive relationship with the dependent measure, showing some support for Hypothesis 15. Additionally, *gender* ( $\beta = -.34$ ) was statistically significant at the .01 level, showing a moderate negative relationship with *rape myth adherence*. This provided moderate support for Hypothesis 13, which stated that males will have a higher likelihood of adhering to common rape myths. *Appalachian identity* ( $\beta = .28$ ) was also statistically significant at the .01 level, indicating that adherence to traditional values served to increase rape myth adherence (providing weak to moderate support for Hypothesis 23 under the sixth research question).

### Chapter Summary

This chapter served to provide a detailed description of the results of the various statistical analyses conducted for the current study. First, sample characteristics were explained via frequencies and descriptive statistics. Next, a breakdown of the descriptive statistics for each of the four scales was provided. Bivariate correlations were also evaluated, through which

various relationships between measures were revealed and the potential for multicollinearity was assessed. Finally, results for the three regression models were presented. They indicated partial support for the study's hypotheses. More specifically, only Hypotheses 9, 13, 15, and 23 were supported via regression analysis. The final chapter will further explain these results and their importance, as well as address study limitations and potential directions for future research.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

The current study aimed to identify and evaluate perceptions of on-campus sexual assault resources, with a specific focus on factors (such as culture) that may serve to influence them. In addition, it sought to determine whether a relationship exists between Appalachian culture and adherence to common rape myths. The previous chapter presented the results from the statistical analyses used to test the current study's hypotheses. The current chapter seeks to elaborate on those results and discuss their meaning and relevance to the topic at hand. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the limitations of the current study, its implications for theory and policy, and potential directions for future research.

### **Knowledge of Resources**

The initial research question sought to explore whether individual characteristics serve to influence knowledge of campus sexual assault resources. Based upon both the research literature and Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory, it was hypothesized that several characteristics would play a role. Specifically, the study hypothesized that males, students of lower classification, first-generation students, and those who grew up in a rural area would all be less likely to claim knowledge of such resources. Alternatively, individuals participating in student organizations and those living on campus were predicted to claim higher levels of knowledge. The regression model designed to test these assertions revealed no significant relationships between the included predictors and the dependent measure. Furthermore, model fit statistics indicated that the predictors were not suitable in exploring variation in knowledge.

It should be noted that the university at which the study was conducted appears to be doing a suitable job of distributing information about sexual assault resources to students based on the mean scores of the specific survey items asking about receiving education about sexual assault and seeing literature on campus ( $M=4.02$  and  $M=4.08$  respectively). Despite this, the

overall mean score for the knowledge scale (M=2.80) is slightly below the theoretical median. These results reveal that while the university may be successfully distributing information about sexual assault resources, students are not retaining specific information—such as where to locate the Title IX Coordinator of the process for notifying campus authorities of victimization. In line with the findings of past research, the possibility exists that simply complying with Title IX requirements regarding the provision of information does not ensure that students are aware of all of the information that they may need (Karjane et al., 2002).

Research has shown that individuals are less likely to remember details about something because they know they have the ability to search for information on the internet (Baxter, 2015), which may also partially explain these findings. However, it remains important to consider that knowledge is distinct from other factors, such as willingness to utilize resources and perceptions of them. Recall that Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory suggests that stages of development serve to socialize individuals into ways of thinking and viewing the world around them. Though it may be expected that the layers within the theory would influence perceptions, it appears as if knowledge is not similarly affected. As such, it may be beneficial to explore other potential explanations for variation in it (outside of the characteristics included within the current study).

### **Willingness to Utilize Resources**

The second research question explored whether a relationship existed between individual characteristics and willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources. Similar to the first research question, it was hypothesized that various individual characteristics would influence student willingness to utilize resources. These hypotheses were also based upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory and the available research literature (Fisher et al.,

2003; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010). Contrary to expectations, the regression model for these hypotheses revealed no significant relationships between gender, student classification, student involvement, living situation, or residency perception and willingness to utilize resources. A likely explanation for these results could be that the topic of sexual assault no longer features the social stigma that existed in the past. For example, Levy and Mattsson (2019) state that social movements such as *MeToo* have increased overall reporting of sexual assault by 14 percent (globally), with a seven percent increase occurring in the United States. Individuals socialized into modern society, such as college students, may be more comfortable talking about sexual assault. They may also be less afraid or embarrassed to report a sexual assault or use other campus resources designed to assist victims regardless of their individual characteristics.

An additional explanation could relate to the hypothetical nature of the survey items. The results pertaining to these hypotheses could have been impacted because the survey items asked respondents if they would be comfortable using campus sexual assault resources rather than if they had used them (assuming past victimization). Research shows that individuals tend to respond differently to hypothetical scenarios than questions related to real life due to a lack of repercussions (FeldmanHall et al., 2012). Put differently, individuals do not have to worry about outcomes related to a choice they make in a hypothetical situation.

Only the hypothesis suggesting that first-generation students would be less willing to utilize campus sexual assault resources was supported in the model. As stated previously, Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) mesosystem layer of development involves relationships between microsystems. Since the family members of first-generation college students do not have experience with the college environment, these students may be intimidated by the experiences that they face. It could be inferred that they are less prepared for college life and find



it more difficult to assimilate into the college setting because they lack a role model to show them how to form relationships with faculty and other individuals in a position of authority. Because the family members of first-generation students may have little insight on how to navigate college life, these students may be less trusting of authority figures and less willing to turn to them in times of need (such as in the event of sexual victimization).

### **Rape Myth Adherence**

The third research question aimed to explore potential relationships between individual characteristics and adherence to common rape myths. Based upon previous literature and Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory, it was hypothesized that rape myth adherence would be higher among males, students of lower classifications, first-generation students, and students who were raised in a rural area. Alternatively, it was hypothesized that students who were involved in campus organizations and students who lived on campus would be less likely to adhere to common rape myths. Ultimately, only two of these hypotheses were met with support.

First, males were found to be more likely to subscribe to common rape myths. As discussed within the research literature, this is likely due to the continued passage of traditional beliefs and gender roles from one generation to the next. Rape myths tend to be centered on a patriarchal mindset, consisting of beliefs such as men not being sexually assaulted due to their more masculine build and personality, and women being at fault for their victimization because of their revealing clothing (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010). Additionally, research has shown that rape myth adherence is often transferred from one generation to the next, especially between a father and son (Haywood & Swank, 2008).

A similar explanation could be used in understanding the finding that first-generation students are more likely to adhere to common rape myths. This classification of student only has the cultural influences of their family members and childhood peers as it relates to sexual activity (Haywood & Swank, 2008). As such, it may be more likely that these students will share the same ideologies as their family members because of their negligible exposure to viewpoints that contradict rape myths—viewpoints that the college setting could have provided them.

The remaining hypotheses under the third research question were not supported by results of the current study. For example, students of a lower classification (e.g., freshman and sophomore) were not found to be less likely to adhere to common rape myths than their more tenured counterparts. This could simply be because the chronosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory (i.e., number of years spent on a college campus) is not a sufficient measure for adherence to rape myths. While Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986; 1995) stated that time is an important component of development, it may not be the most influential layer. As such, the belief system that a student is surrounded by during childhood may be more likely to continue on through adulthood, despite being exposed to contrasting beliefs while on a college campus over time.

It was also posited that students who were involved in campus organizations would be less likely to adhere to common rape myths, based upon the microsystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory. Results of the current study did not support this hypothesis, which could mean that student involvement may not impact adherence to rape myths. While the microsystem layer may be important to individual development, research shows that once individuals reach adulthood, they seek out groups that hold similar beliefs and values as their own (Bahns, Crandall & Preacher, 2017). As such, students may join

organizations on campus that conform to their beliefs and values, making it less likely that membership in these organizations alone will influence their perceptions.

The fifth hypothesis under the third research question aimed to explore the relationship between living situation and rape myth adherence, positing that students who lived on-campus would be less likely to adhere to common rape myths, as compared to students living off-campus. The lack of support for this hypothesis could be explained in a similar manner. Although belonging to groups is essential to human growth and development, it may be that by adulthood individuals seek out groups that hold similar belief systems as their own (Bahns et al., 2017). Additionally, even though a student lives off-campus, they may still be interacting with other students just as much as students who live on-campus. As such, whether a student lives on- or off-campus may not be a sufficient measure for adherence to common rape myths.

The final hypothesis stated that students who perceived the area in which they were raised as rural would be more likely to adhere to common rape myths. This hypothesis was based upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) macrosystem layer of development, due to differing values being passed down to younger generations in rural areas (as compared to urban locales). Results for this hypothesis were not supportive of the expectation. It is possible that the mindset of students moving away from their rural upbringing and into a more urbanized area may explain this finding. In spite of their geographic origin, they may hold differing attitudes and ideologies than their family members due to their exposure to new ideas and beliefs in the more progressive culture found in college towns.

### **Impact of Geography and Culture**

The fourth and fifth research questions aimed to determine whether a relationship existed between Appalachian culture and knowledge of, and willingness to utilize, campus sexual assault

resources. Two hypotheses were established for each question, with the first (for each) focusing on Appalachian identity. Based upon previous research on the beliefs and ideologies commonly found in rural Appalachia (Liederbach & Frank, 2003; Murphy & McConnell, 1982; Welch, 2011), it was expected that students who identified as Appalachian would be less knowledgeable of campus sexual assault resources and less willing to utilize those resources. Multivariate analysis revealed no support for either assertion. Since much of the research literature on Appalachian culture is dated, it is possible that these findings could relate to the Appalachian Region not being as unique as it once was. More recent studies have shown that its culture is ever-evolving due to the continued incorporation of modern technologies (e.g., internet) and belief systems (Hatch, 2008; Keefe, 2008; Obermiller & Maloney, 2016). Put differently, culture is somewhat “globalized” in that values and beliefs are now easily transferred, whereas past generations were isolated from new ideas. It would follow that the impact of adherence to traditional Appalachian values may not extend to topics (like sexual assault and victim resources) to the degree that it once did.

The final two hypotheses related to the impact of culture stated that students who were raised in the Appalachian Region would be less knowledgeable of, and less willing to utilize, campus sexual assault resources. These were also met with a lack of support. Rationalizing these outcomes could rely on the changing nature of Appalachian culture, as just discussed. Alternatively, they could also be explained by the assumption that these young people already feature different perspectives compared to other individuals in the Appalachian Region. Their willingness to pursue higher education in spite of the negative perception of it within the Region may suggest that their attitudes in other areas (e.g. reporting sexual assault) are different as well. These students may have more progressive beliefs and attitudes, meaning that their Appalachian

upbringing does not impact their perceptions of sexual assault resources as much as originally hypothesized.

Slightly contrasting results were found for the sixth research question. This question explored the existence of a relationship between Appalachian culture and adherence to common rape myths. It was hypothesized that students identifying as Appalachian via the values scale, and those simply raised in the Region, would be more likely to subscribe to these myths. Bivariate correlations revealed some support for these predictions, indicating that Appalachian upbringing may increase students' likelihood of adhering to common rape myths. Though culture did not appear to influence knowledge and willingness, there may still be a uniqueness found in Appalachia in terms of attitudes and ideologies surrounding rape culture and traditional gender roles/responsibilities. These results are in line with past research, which as previously mentioned, states that Appalachia tends to have a more patriarchal belief system where women have the purpose of being the more subservient wife and mother (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). This is important to note because addressing traditional gender roles and adherence to common rape myths among Appalachian individuals could reduce the prevalence of sexual assault within that culture. Now that results from the current study have been discussed in greater detail, attention will be turned to the limitations within the study.

## **Implications**

**Theoretical implications.** Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986; 1995) suggested that each of the five layers in his ecological theory was crucial to explaining human development. The theory was created in a way that could be generalizable to various aspects of an individual's life (e.g., relationships with others or success at school). While its original focus was on development during childhood, the current study aimed to test whether it is generalizable to aspects of an adult

individual's life, such as knowledge of and willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources, and adherence to common rape myths. Results revealed that Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory may not be sufficient at explaining an individual's knowledge of a particular topic; however, the theory may be more applicable when examining an individual's ideologies and belief systems (e.g., adherence to rape myths), and their willingness to do a certain act (e.g., utilize campus sexual assault resources). As such, the current study only shows partial support for the generalizability of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) ecological theory.

While all five layers of the ecological theory may be crucial to childhood development, results suggest that only the mesosystem and macrosystem layers were applicable to the current topic. The groups that an individual belongs to or does not belong to (i.e., being a first-generation student or coming from a family with a history of higher education) may influence their willingness to report a sexual assault to campus authorities or administrative staff. This is certainly supportive of the mesosystem layer of the ecological theory. Additionally, the revelation of a relationship between Appalachian culture and rape myth adherence provides support for the macrosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) theory because the attitudes and beliefs that an individual develops while growing up in this male-dominant culture may carry through adulthood, despite relocating to a more urbanized area in pursuit of higher education.

**Policy implications.** Ultimately, the study's results suggest that focusing on rape myth adherence and the factors that influence it may be most pressing for higher education institutions (specifically those located in the Appalachian region). Title IX currently includes policies that address an institution's responsibility to respond to sexual assault incidents, as well as prevent future incidents (Department of Education, 2011). With that said, there are no current policies

that require universities to address rape culture and belief systems that could lead to a sexual assault (e.g., an individual expecting sexual interactions if they are invited back to their date's home). As such, universities could increase rape myth education programming targeting males, first-generation students, and students coming from a geographically and culturally rural area (e.g., Appalachia).

Additionally, results suggest a moderately lower likelihood of willingness to utilize campus sexual assault resources among first-generation students. Research shows that universities already have programs and procedures in place to help first-generation students transition into the college atmosphere and become more comfortable interacting with faculty and other students (Falcon, 2015). Higher education institutes could create additional programming to specifically assist first-generation students in becoming more comfortable talking about sexual assault, as well as increasing the approachability of faculty and administrative staff.

Finally, requiring universities to be more uniform and consistent in terms of how they provide information regarding sexual assault resources to their students and staff could be beneficial. Because both faculty members and students may be associated with different institutions during their academic career, it may be beneficial for there to be uniformity in how higher education institutions disseminate information about sexual assault and sexual assault resources. In doing so, the process of assisting a student with reporting a sexual assault or finding other resources would become more familiar to all involved.

### **Limitations**

Although the current study provided new insight into student perceptions of campus sexual assault resources and adherence to common rape myths, there are several limitations that must be addressed. First, because the sample consisted of students from a single university, results may

not be representative of student perceptions throughout the Appalachian region (or beyond it). Despite this limitation, any attempt at determining relationships between Appalachian culture and perceptions of campus sexual assault resources is beneficial due to the lack of research on the topic. Additionally, the sampling strategy utilized for this study eliminated several classes of students, including those taking online courses, graduate students and students who grew up outside of the United States. Perceptions of campus sexual assault resources and common rape myths may be different for these classes of students; therefore, results may not be generalizable to all types of individuals pursuing a college degree.

Finally, two limitations relate to the manner in which respondents were asked about their perceptions. First, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, respondents may not have answered all questions truthfully despite the anonymous nature of data collection. Second, the hypothetical nature of survey questions may have impacted responses. Put differently, some individuals may respond to an actual victimization differently than they believe they would. However, asking questions in this manner was necessary for promoting response and avoiding the potential for students (who had been victimized) to suffer secondary trauma.

### **Directions for Future Research**

In spite of the fact that this study did not identify a notable relationship between Appalachian origin/values and perceptions of campus sexual assault resources, future researchers should continue to explore the topic. Conducting similar studies at higher education institutions throughout the Appalachian Region would present the opportunity to better understand any potential relationship, as the current study was limited to only a single setting. Furthermore, future researchers may wish to include all classes of students in their projects (e.g., online and



graduate students). This would serve to increase generalizability, as the focus would no longer be on a specific group of students (i.e., those studying at the undergraduate level).

In addition, researchers may also seek to explore lived experiences, as opposed to just perceptions. As stated in previous chapters, focusing on hypothetical scenarios may have led to responses that were not wholly truthful. FeldmanHall et al. (2012) stated that when faced with a hypothetical situation, individuals are free to choose a response without having to face any of the repercussions associated with their choice. In terms of campus sexual assault, it may have been easier for participants in the current study to state that they would utilize resources because they were not struggling with the typical barriers to reporting an actual victimization. As such, asking respondents about their actual utilization of sexual assault resources may lead to more realistic results.

Finally, future researchers could focus on additional theoretical predictors for perceptions of campus sexual assault resources. The lack of support for many of the study's hypotheses suggests that Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986; 1995) conceptualization may not be the best means of exploring variation in knowledge and beliefs. Turning to other theories of development, both within and outside of the sociological sphere, may assist in better understanding the factors that truly matter.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of the limitations associated with the current study, results have aided in filling the gap in the research literature surrounding the impact of culture on perceptions of campus sexual assault resources. Most previous studies on this topic involved exploring differences by characteristics such as race and gender, while neglecting to determine if an individual's cultural upbringing, specifically in Appalachia, also contributes to their knowledge of and willingness to

utilize sexual assault resources. The results of this study could aid higher education institutions in implementing new programming or adjusting current programming to better educate students coming from the Appalachian region on the topic of campus sexual assault. Additionally, results of the current study could prompt additional research involving the impact culture has on perceptions of sexual assault, victim resources and common rape myths.

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APPENDIX: Survey Instrument

**The following questions will ask you a little bit about yourself. Please answer each one to the best of your ability.**

1. Which of the following best describes your gender? *Please circle one.*
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Non-binary
  - d. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Have you spent the majority of your life living in the United States? *Please circle one.*
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Have you spent the majority of your life living in the Appalachia region (based upon the information provided to you in the accompanying handout)? *Please circle one.*
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Which of the following best describes the geographic area where you have lived for the majority of your life? *Please circle one.*
  - a. 0-2,500
  - b. 2,501-10,000
  - c. 10,001-25,000

- d. 25,001-50,000
- e. 50,001-75,000
- f. 75,001 +

6. Which of the following would you use to define the geographic area where you have lived for the majority of your life? *Please circle one.*

- a. Rural community
- b. Small town
- c. Large town
- d. Small city
- e. Large city

7. What is your current classification at ETSU? *Please circle one.*

- a. Freshman
- b. Sophomore
- c. Junior
- d. Senior
- e. Graduate student
- f. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Are you the first member of your immediate family (i.e. mother, father, legal guardian, siblings) to attend college? *Please circle one.*

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

9. Do you currently live on-campus or off-campus? *Please circle one.* (If you circle on-campus, please skip to Question #12)

- a. On-campus
- b. Off-campus

10. If you currently live off-campus, do you live in a student community (student apartments, fraternity/sorority house, etc.)?

*Please circle one.*

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. If you currently live off-campus, which of the following best describes your living arrangement? *Please circle one.*

- a. I live with family
- b. I live with friends
- c. I live alone
- d. Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

12. Are you a member of any official campus sports teams (such as football, soccer, cross-country, basketball, etc.)? *Please circle one.*

- a. Yes
- b. No

13. Please indicate whether you belong to any of the following types of student organizations. *Please circle yes or no for each category of organization.*

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Academic clubs (honor societies, clubs related to your major)	Yes	No
Activity clubs (such as sports clubs, hobby clubs, and political clubs)	Yes	No
Greek life organizations (social fraternities or sororities)	Yes	No
Faith-based organizations	Yes	No
Service organizations (centered around community services)	Yes	No
Residence life organizations (such as councils for student housing)	Yes	No

**The following items ask about your beliefs and perceptions. Please state your level of agreement with each statement by circling one of the available numbers (from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I don't feel you can trust someone unless you know their family	1	2	3	4	5
It is important for me to live in a place where I have "roots"	1	2	3	4	5
Things happen the way God intends	1	2	3	4	5
I am very close to my family	1	2	3	4	5
I was raised in the Appalachian region	1	2	3	4	5
I have a hard time trusting people who are not from my community	1	2	3	4	5
My religious beliefs tell me to accept what happens as God's will	1	2	3	4	5
I grew up in a community where education was not highly valued	1	2	3	4	5
In my community there is a strong emphasis on tradition	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that tried and true ways of doing things are the best	1	2	3	4	5
The values in my community are different from the rest of the country	1	2	3	4	5
I feel very attached to my family	1	2	3	4	5
I am highly involved in my community	1	2	3	4	5
Most of the people in my community have a sense of common history	1	2	3	4	5
My relationships with kin (or kinfolk) are stronger than my relationships with my friends	1	2	3	4	5
Most of the people in my community know my family	1	2	3	4	5

**The following items ask about your knowledge and perceptions of sexual assault resources. Please state your level of agreement with each statement by circling one of the available numbers (from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
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I have received education about rape or sexual assault while in college	1	2	3	4	5
I have seen literature (such as a flyer) posted on campus for campus sexual assault resources	1	2	3	4	5
I know what Title IX is	1	2	3	4	5
I know the role of the Title IX Coordinator	1	2	3	4	5
I know where to find the contact information for the Title IX Coordinator	1	2	3	4	5
I know where to go on campus to file a sexual assault report	1	2	3	4	5
I am familiar with the procedures of reporting a sexual assault on campus	1	2	3	4	5
I am familiar with the different types of reports that can be filed on campus regarding sexual assault	1	2	3	4	5
I know where the counseling center is located on campus	1	2	3	4	5
I am comfortable talking to university administrative staff and campus authorities	1	2	3	4	5
I would be comfortable going to the counseling center after a sexual assault	1	2	3	4	5
I would be comfortable disclosing a sexual assault to a friend	1	2	3	4	5
I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to an instructor or professor on campus	1	2	3	4	5
I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to a campus administrator	1	2	3	4	5
I would be comfortable reporting a sexual assault to a campus police officer	1	2	3	4	5
I would attend an on-campus event for sexual assault prevention	1	2	3	4	5

**The following items ask about your perceptions of dating and sexual activity. Please state your level of agreement with each statement by circling one of the available numbers (from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).**

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
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It is acceptable for a person to get upset if their partner agrees to sexual activity but then later changes their mind	1	2	3	4	5
It is still consensual sex if a person changes their mind and wants to stop in the middle of the encounter, but their partner chooses to continue	1	2	3	4	5
Many girls pretend they do not want sex because they do not want to appear 'easy'	1	2	3	4	5
If a person is raped while they are drunk, they may be somewhat responsible for placing themselves in a vulnerable situation	1	2	3	4	5
When a person says no to sex what they really mean is maybe	1	2	3	4	5
People often lie about being sexually assaulted	1	2	3	4	5
A person can consent to sexual activity if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol	1	2	3	4	5
If a person does not physically fight back, then they cannot say they were raped	1	2	3	4	5
When a person asks their date back to their place, it is likely that something sexual will happen	1	2	3	4	5
It is okay for a person to assume that their partner wants to have sex if they have been dating for a long time	1	2	3	4	5
When girls go to parties in revealing clothing they are asking for trouble	1	2	3	4	5
A person can assume their intimate partner wants to have sex at any time	1	2	3	4	5
Men cannot be raped or sexually assaulted	1	2	3	4	5
If a person does not say no, they cannot say they have been raped	1	2	3	4	5
Males have a difficult time controlling their sexual urges	1	2	3	4	5
Most people cannot afford to use victim services for sexual assault (such as counseling, medical treatment, or legal services)	1	2	3	4	5

## VITA

### RYCHELLE MOSES

- Education: M.A. Criminal Justice and Criminology, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2020
- B.A. Criminal Justice and Criminology, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia, 2014
- B.A. Psychology, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia, 2014
- Norwin Senior High School, North Huntingdon, Pennsylvania
- Professional Experience: Master Teacher/Counselor, Pressley Ridge Grant Gardens, Ona, West Virginia, 2014-2015
- Youth Services Coordinator, Branches Domestic Violence Shelter, Huntington, West Virginia, 2016-2018
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Criminal Justice, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2018-2020
- Publications: Edwards, B., Osborne, D. L., Edwards, B., Moses, R., Ledford, L., & Smith, G. (Under Review). Municipal police department's use of Facebook: Exploring the potential for differences across size classifications.